

The department for education education essay

[Education](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

[Level 6 Research Project EDS6032]Victoria BondLeeds Trinity University
CollegeWhat is the effect of class size on the quality of education provided in
the early years?

Introduction

Over the past decade, evidence suggests that the average size of classes within state maintained primary schools has risen steadily. The definition of "class size" is generally taken to mean the number of pupils under the supervision of one teacher in a classroom environment. There has been an active debate whether the size of the classes in which pupils are taught has a profound impact upon performance and the quality of education provided. Considerable media coverage has been given to all aspects of the discussion which has consequently attracted a significant amount of attention in recent years from the public as well as from educational professionals. Many members of these groups are convinced that smaller classes can achieve more effective learning; it is evident that there has been a wealth of research presented in support of this view. However, it has, for the most part, failed to provide a reliable connection between class size and attainment, raising the possibility that pupils may not necessarily do better in smaller classes. Although extremely instructive, these studies, mainly conducted outside the UK, have been largely short-term and narrow in focus, with inconsistencies in findings that indicate strongly the need for further examination of the topic. In Britain there has been a marked absence of educational initiatives and research comparable to those in the USA, but this has not restricted the fervour of the debate about class size, extending into legislative action. In the INSERT ACT HERE, a legal maximum of 30 pupils

was imposed on primary school class sizes. However, current government policy is that this may be relaxed under certain circumstances, which has obviously caused additional controversy about fears of a potential drop in standards. Conversely, many policy makers, perhaps with an eye on costs, insist that reduction in class size is less important than improving teaching strategies. It is self-evident that the size of the class cannot be the only factor determining educational achievement; for example, poor teaching, with its clear relationship to the ability of pupils to make progress, will surely be of relevance regardless of the size of the class.

Rationale, Aims and Objectives

The Department for Education has developed various means of recognising schools with the highest achievement levels, usually ranked by success in SATs and league tables. However, the conclusions drawn from these assessments have not always been applied successfully across the state school sector. In an attempt to address the shortfall in performance, development of strategies in public education has been directed more recently towards being based on assumptions of certainty: that from positive actions, positive results will inevitably follow. It has, for some time, been assumed that the quality of education offered to children increases directly in proportion to the teacher: child ratio applicable in the classroom. So, having a straight one to one format for tuition is to be preferred to one to thirty and, with varying levels of satisfaction, to all other ratios in between. A significant percentage of educational professionals believe that this scenario is of particular relevance in the early years where larger class sizes can lead directly to a lowering in the level of achievement of the children affected. In

parallel with this, wide-spread support for the strategy has emerged amongst the general public. However, international academic studies into the impact on educational outcomes of varying class sizes have produced differing, sometimes contradictory, conclusions. This is further complicated by the rather patchy nature of research carried out in the UK, so that the overwhelming proportion of the body of research into this topic has been conducted in the United States. The aim of this study is to consider whether the conclusions of American research, indicating a direct correlation between class size and the quality of education provided, can reasonably be extended to the British system. It is intended to present a detailed review of the topic as set out in current literature and thus critically to assess the relationship between class size and the quality of education. The researcher conducting this study will summarize the literature and depict the findings in a way that supports the need for reduction in class size and the necessity to address its negative impacts, while maintaining a realistic approach to educational reform. As the class size debate persists throughout all children's educational experience, it is evident that the need for drastic revision of class reduction policy is necessary. While this study is of necessity limited in scope, the data collected is of value and can lead the reader to form their own conclusions.

Literature Review and Background Context

For the past half century, class size has been a complex issue that has had a significant impact on education and those that are involved in the process, with its implications being considered in many countries (Borland et al, 2005). Educators, parents and governmental figures all have distinct

opinions concerning the importance of class size and how it influences the effectiveness of learning which takes place in each setting (White, 1997). Yet, the uncertainty of much of the findings has left academics struggling to find any definitive answer to the question 'are smaller classes more effective?' To help address this question, this literature review is divided into five sections. The goal of the first section is to present a brief overview of the theoretical underpinning behind why smaller classes are highly beneficial within any early years setting. The second and third sections provide an investigation of selected research, primarily across America but including the few carried out in the United Kingdom, in order to demonstrate whether class size has any effect on quality of education. Section four examines the government policy and the final section will discuss whether class sizes should actually be reduced.

Why reduce class size in the early years?

Many researchers and studies explored the effects of smaller classes on pupils in the initial years of primary schooling (Hoxby, 2000). Hattie (2005) concurs by illustrating how the consensus among many within the education system is that smaller classes allow a better quality of teaching and learning. However, although it may seem obvious, it is important to examine why smaller classes appear to produce better results for younger children. Mosteller (1995) proposed factors that made it likely that younger students benefited most from a reduction in class size. When children first enter a structured school environment from a variety of homes and circumstances, they are confronted with numerous changes and much confusion (Kennedy, 2003). Hence, a key element of the structure in a smaller classroom setting

is the ability of the practitioner to connect with all students individually. This in turn tends to establish a higher level of morale among students enabling a more conducive learning environment (Bracey, 1999). Moyles (2007) discusses how the foundations of all functional coping mechanisms are developed within the early years of a child's life, such as: paying attention, carrying out tasks and interacting with others in a social situation. Further Achilles et al (2002) suggest that reduced class size could cause these skills to be developed at a faster rate, therefore enhancing all pupils' effective habits to serve them in their later years of education. This concept also offers an explanation for why class size reduction in the later years of education does not result in such a significant level of gain for students as these pupils have already established their foundations of learning (Finn et al, 1989). Teaching young children requires immense energy and attention (Pollard, 2005). Where there are fewer children in the classroom at any given moment, whole group management requires less time, meaning that the educator has more opportunities to devote to each child (Holloway, 2002). As a result, teachers have a better opportunity to observe each child's interests and activities, allowing for a more in depth and concise lesson plan that responds to all children's needs and learning styles (Barnett and Schulman, 2004). These increased interactions and communications made possible by smaller classes have been shown to improve children's overall outcomes in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2011).

International research comparisons

British research-or lack of

It is evident that currently, in the United Kingdom, little research has been conducted on the topic of class size (Blatchford et al, 2002). Until recently, the lack of national information on class size relating to pupil achievement has prevented an in depth analysis from being conducted (Milesi and Gamoran, 2006)[any ideas why there has been so little British research?]

Government Policy and Change

The field of early year's education and care has not always received an appropriate degree of attention (Palaiologou & Male, 2013). In truth, 10-15 years ago the idea of government voicing anything concerning care and education of children aged 0-5 was pretty much unheard of (Leach, 2011). [will this area be expanded in section 4 or is this the first stab at starting section 4?]

Or should they remain larger?